3: Wolf F-5 (1959-1961) 1968 AD5 Taiwan Hokkien
Taiwan AD6

chapter 1

THE CITY AND THE MARKET TOWN

Taiwan is a beautiful green island, 240 miles long and 88 miles wide. 13 •
On the east coast the mountains rise straight from the sea to over
13,000 feet. Stretches of the one-lane highway connecting north and [491]
south are literally carved out of cliffs that hang above the Pacific. The
mountains, a steep, tangled mass of rich tropical foliage and giant
trees, appear uninhabitable and uninhabited, but the remnants of nine
different aborigine groups somehow manage a living on their precipi-
tous slopes. In the west the mountains descend less dramatically onto
a fertile plain that extends to the sea. It is on the rich, alluvial soils of
this plain that the majority of the twelve million Chinese inhabitants
make their home. Nearly every tillable foot of land is sectioned and
under cultivation. In the north, where the dry season is limited to a
few weeks in the fall, the land is a patchwork of neatly squared and
banked rice paddies. On a sunny day the intensity of the green in a
paddy of young growing rice plants is almost painful; even on the dull,
humid days of summer the green seems to rise in the steaming air,
distorting colors into complements. Farther south, where the dry season
is longer, the color is more subdued, both because wet paddy farming
is less common and because the foliage is not washed by a daily rain.

The capital of Taiwan, Taipei, sits in a damp basin on the northern 633
tip of the plain. People who have lived in Peiping and Nanking say it [361]
is an ugly city, lacking the beauty of cities on the Chinese mainland
but retaining all their faults. Since much of its growth took place

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chapter 2

THE VILLAGE

361 Passing out of the narrow lane into the open countryside is like pass-
• 13 ing through the gates of a walled city. The backs of the tall, window-
less brick houses form a solid barrier between the noise of the town
and the stillness of the country. The shouts of street hawkers and the
loud inquiries of customers are softened to a murmur. The senses are
now more impressed by what is seen than by what is heard. In the
distance the mountains limit the eyes' sweep. Even the thick anarchy
of ferns and trees and vines does not relieve their harsh, jagged lines.
But, on a hot day, as the humidity builds up, the mountains recede,
become vague and indistinct, the misty impressions of an old Chinese
scroll. An uneven line of shrubs and trees, darker in color, more
precise in outline, seems to be at the base of the mountains but
actually is several miles closer, hugging the damp banks of the Tamsui
River, sheltering the village of Peihotien. This area on which Tapu
turns its back is known as Hotien.

* 596 Although there are now many surnames represented in Hotien, the
601 district was originally settled by the Lim family. The Chinese record
173 the births, marriages, and deaths of their male progeny in genealogies,
613 thus providing a skeletal history of their lineage. To them, the impor-
175 tant part of the document is the long family tree which traces their
line of descent back through many centuries, but in most genealogies
there is also a short essay describing the family's place of origin, the
location of the clan temple that houses the memorial tablets of more
distant ancestors, and perhaps even some sketches of the temple itself.
124 It is from a document of this kind and from rambling conversations
173 with the elderly men and women of Peihotien that I obtained the
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death, and marriage. In Tapu, Tu Ti Kung is the patron of the business establishments in his neighborhood. In Peihotien, he watches over the village farmers.

Peihotien is by far the most attractive of the villages of Hotien. The others have become dusty tangles of buildings in a maze of narrow paths. Unwilling to give up the precious paddy land for anything so unprofitable as living space, the growing population has built new wings and even new houses in courtyards and passageways, destroying trees and shrubs that once gave grace to their setting. Few houses enjoy the filtered shade of old trees, and the scraggly bushes scattered among them are so frequently attacked by animals and children that their life expectancy is short. Peihotien's site on the bank of the Tamsui is, by comparison, luxuriant in large healthy trees and a variety of smaller greenery. In the days when the area was settled, long before modern truck farming, the thin, sandy soil appeared useless, fit only for building sites, kitchen gardens, and drying grounds. Peihotien has grown as rapidly as its neighbors, but there is still an unusual amount of space between houses. Several families make use of it by maintaining bamboo groves, adding tender bamboo shoots to their diet and another source of shade and texture to their landscape. Even in the dry days after the rice harvest when hot winds carry the dust from the drained paddies high into the air, Peihotien seems more protected, cooler, cleaner. From a distance the other villages of Hotien can readily be identified for what they are, but Peihotien is a pleasant uncertainty, a clump of dark green foliage with a suggestion of rose brick and a glimpse of the soaring lines of a rich tile roof.

Before 1920, when the railroad was laid through Tapu, Peihotien's location on the Tamsui River had more than aesthetic value. The river, as a major thoroughfare, was important to the economy of the village. Two or three families supplemented their farm income by poling ferries across the river and several village men supported their families by transporting goods between the remote villages and Taipei. Peihotien was an agricultural village, but its farmers depended upon the river to tide them over when crops failed or families became too large. The advent of the railroad with its faster, more comfortable transportation soon ended river travel and the advantage of Peihotien's position beside it. Before long the railroad took the river's place in the village's economy, and then some. It was less than a half hour's walk from Peihotien to the railway station in Tapu and only a few more minutes by train to the factories in other cities.